

Media release

PHARMAC to fund new multiple myeloma treatments

PHARMAC is enabling New Zealanders with multiple myeloma (MM) to benefit from early use of a new treatment, bortezomib (Velcade) as well as providing wider access to thalidomide, another treatment used for MM.

In a decision to take effect from 1 May, PHARMAC is funding bortezomib so that it can be used as first or second line treatment for multiple myeloma or amyloidosis, both of which are incurable blood disorders with few treatment options.

Thalidomide has been funded for patients with relapsed or refractory multiple myeloma for many years. The current decision allows treatment at any stage in the disease process for patients with either MM or amyloidosis.

Both thalidomide and bortezomib are hospital cancer treatments. Bortezomib is administered in-hospital through an intravenous line, while thalidomide is given orally.

PHARMAC Medical Director Dr Peter Moodie says it's likely haematologists will look to use bortezomib early on in their patients' treatment regimens and that it may become the first line treatment of choice in NZ for multiple myeloma and amyloidosis. Bortezomib, is not yet funded for first line use in either Australia or Britain.

"The new funding rules will mean that patients will be able to access funded thalidomide repeatedly although they will be able to have only one treatment course of bortezomib either as the first or second line therapy. The optimal treatment algorithm for each individual patient will be at the discretion of the treating clinician." says Dr Moodie.

Dr Moodie says both drugs provide benefits over standard chemotherapy treatments.

"The trials show that both thalidomide and bortezomib can help extend the duration of patients remaining disease-free, and can extend life," he says. "These are important additions to the tools that haematologists can use to treat multiple myeloma and amyloidosis."

PHARMAC expects between 700 and 750 patients to be treated each year, at a total cost of \$24 million over 5 years.

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